

HOW THE BLIND READ
By One Of Them
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A. F. GRAEPP

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MUSIC lovers who hear or play Beethoven's compositions often do not realize that quite a number of his most beautiful works were written while he was stone deaf. Likewise, those who read *Paradise Lost*, do not often realize that John Milton wrote this great masterpiece while totally blind.

Those who read those great poetic gems of Homer, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, do not think of Homer as totally blind when he wrote them.

Those who might wonder how it feels to be blind and sit in continual darkness may get a very faint idea of such an ordeal if, some time when they have the time, they tie a cloth over their eyes, as they do in "Blind Man's Buff," and then, for three or four hours, try and find their way around at home. This is what the writer of the novel entitled "The Rosary" pictures the heroine doing in order to find out for herself the sensations which her blind lover was experiencing.

There is a book which those interested may obtain in most of the large libraries in the country which gives the history of the treatment which the blind have received in the world from the time of Homer until today, the day of Miss Helen Keller. It is entitled "From Homer to Helen Keller." Its author, Dr. Richard French, is superintendent of the California State School for the Blind at Berkeley, Calif.

The reader of this book will find many interesting facts which up to now have been unknown to the ordinary American Christian, especially the American Lutheran. For instance, Dr. French tells us that, while Martin Luther probably did not have anything to do with the actual founding of the movement, yet he actually gave the world the IDEA for an institution about which we hear every year, about Christmas time: The Community Chest Drives.

Among the most interesting information given by Dr. French in his book, is that the great King Cyrus, who was so friendly to the children of Israel during his reign, once had a member of his court who had trouble with his eyes. King Cyrus therefore sent to the country which at that time was the center of the world's culture and medical training, EGYPT. Ancient sources tell us as Dr. French indicates, that the Egyptians at that time knew of thirty-six different diseases of the eye alone.

This book gives the history of the various reading and writing systems used in the education of the blind since the year of about 500 B.C. The story in the New Testament of Jesus, on His way to Jerusalem to offer up His supreme sacrifice, shows a glimpse of the condition of the blind. As He was nearing Jericho, we are told that a blind man cried out at Him: "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me." He was a beggar, and when Jesus gave the command, he had to be led to Him.

Wretched as this blind beggar's condition was, yet Dr. French seems to convey the opinion that the condition of those blind in heathen countries outside of Palestine was still worse. They were in most cases driven from one place to another, exploited and buffed about like animals and their lives were one continual groan of agony. It was only the influence of Christianity which caused the emancipation of the blind from such a lowly condition.

Generally speaking, there are very few exceptions to the rule that no one can understand the problems of the blind, except those who have either lost their sight themselves or have been blind at one time.

It is for this reason mentioned that the two systems used most extensively today by the blind in reading are so popular. Braille and Moon, the originators of these two systems, were totally blind when they invented their systems. What a boon such reading systems are to the blind can be imagined if you imagine yourself in a foreign country, and all around you someone is talking a language you do not understand, and you must have an interpreter to know what is going on. This is particularly true when it comes to reading the Word of God.

Your present writer has now been blind two years. At first, it was hard for me to accommodate myself to the thought of being forced to depend upon others for the pastime of gaining knowledge. Of course, there was the radio, which has become my newspaper, school, and theater, and, whenever there is just cause for remaining away from church, the radio has served as a church.

For eight long months I had to depend upon my mother's loving eyes for a little word of God, unless my pastor found time to come and read something to me and offer up a few words of prayer

with me. Sometimes, he would begin a hymn which I knew that I had learned while still in my youth. As stated before, this went on for eight months, which sometimes seemed years, before I learned to read by the sense of touch. After about four months of blindness, by God's good will I came in contact with a lady who had herself never seen the sun, and was willing to teach me to read by my fingertips. I lost my sight in March, but about August 15, I began to learn to read Braille. By November, I had progressed so far that I was able to read in the grade in which I could obtain a New Testament in Braille. So I sent in to the Braille editor for your synod, Rev. A. H. Kuntz, who lives in Alhambra, California. The cost for this New Testament in Braille (five volumes, about 11 x 11 x 3 inches each), was a dollar and a quarter, plus twenty-five cents for transportation to me for the entire set, so that the entire set plus postage cost me but a dollar and a half. When I told my teacher about this price, she told me that such a price would not even begin to pay for the paper upon which the Holy Word is printed. In the fifteen months I have had this Braille New Testament, I have almost read it through completely from Matthew to Revelation. No doubt I would have finished it by this time, had I not stopped to read the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles for the second time. Also, last year, during the Lenten season, I read parts of the Passion Story more frequently than other parts of the New Testament.

If some of you who read this article would like to know what the Braille System is like, I shall be glad to send you a copy of the alphabet if you will send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to your editor, who will forward it to me. I have been writing Braille since about six months ago, so it will be but a few moments for me to write out a little card, containing the Braille alphabet, with the ordinary alphabet written out in pencil, so that you may see which letters correspond with the Braille letters.

My teacher, as said before, is blind herself, and has never seen the sun. She lives about 175 miles from me, and is employed to teach the blind to read by our state library, which is one of the twenty depository libraries of the Library of Congress. The books I borrow

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are sent free of postage to me. The wrapper on each book is so arranged that it can be reversed, and on the inside is pasted a return label, so that when I am finished, I have someone rewrap the book, put my own return address in the proper place, and the book is ready to be returned. Since it does not need postage, it need not be weighed. Hence, whenever I have a book to be returned to the library, I call the local post office and tell the supervisor in charge, and the book is collected when the carrier is in the neighborhood on his next delivery. About three years ago, a law was passed by Congress allowing for the free transportation of books for the blind in this way, as also regular periodicals, such as the "Lutheran Messenger for the Blind," which is issued throughout the year except August, by the deaf-blind mission board of your synod.

It is a well-known fact that no president has done as much for the blind as has Franklin D. Roosevelt. It is through his influence that Congress sets aside over five hundred thousand dollars each year for reading matter for the blind.

In addition to the Braille System, in which most of the reading matter for the blind is printed, there are a few books in Moon type. If you should like to see what Moon type is like, you may send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to your editor and you will receive a copy of the Moon alphabet. Please be sure to designate whether you wish the Moon alphabet or Braille, as your request must be sent to two different parties, and if you wish both, enclose two envelopes.

The Moon System, which like Braille, takes its name from its inventor, is a remote second to the Braille System, and is usually limited in its application to elderly people, who would find difficulty in learning the many forms to be learned in Braille. Your synod issues a periodical also in this system. The editor is the Rev. O. C. Schroeder, of Chicago, Illinois. Pastor Schroeder issues also a German Braille paper. His Moon type paper is entitled "The Lutheran Herald for the Blind," and his German paper bears the title of "Der Lutherische Bote." Thus your synod is not forgetting the blind and deaf-blind in its list of periodicals.

In addition to these two systems of reading for the blind, the United States government has also provided for those unfortunates who are not only blind, but also crippled. I am thinking of one young man, cut in Nebraska, who is blind, and has had his fingers crippled by arthritis so that he cannot feel the Braille letters of the reading matter. It is for such doubly afflicted individuals

that your government, through the American Foundation for the Blind, of New York City, has a system called the "Talking Book System." It is composed of phonograph records which are loaned to the blind just as Braille books are loaned, through the depository libraries. The blind person needs only to supply himself with an electric machine in order to avail himself, or herself of this service. In some cases, the talking book machines have been donated to those who could not afford to supply themselves with them. The talking book recording sets are also sent through the mails free of postage just like the books.

These talking book machines are so arranged that all the blind person needs to do is to put his or her particular recording on the turntable, set a lever, and the machine gives him the lecture which he desires.

The well-known magazine, "The Readers' Digest," for quite some time already has been issued in Braille. In addition, it is now possible for blind people to obtain it in talking-book form.

Through the Braille system, my teacher was able to teach me the touch system of typing. A friend loaned me her personal typewriter, and thus enabled me to practice the lessons sent to me in Braille. Then, when a relative was found to be afflicted with asthma she induced him to sell me his typewriter, so I obtained such a necessary machine at a great bargain.

Perhaps you have asked yourself: "What can I do for my blind brothers and sisters?" If you will allow one of them to make a few suggestions, perhaps you may find something which appeals to you as a task, you can perform for Him who healed the blind man at Jericho.

Your writer has been in twenty-three states of the country, and Old Mexico, although he has never been in any of them more than a week, except in Arizona, California, Missouri, New York, and Wisconsin. In his travels, his first contact with Braille came about ten years ago.

The writer had accompanied one of the institutional missionaries to the house of correction of one of the middle-western cities. This missionary had brought along with him a copy of Luther's Small Catechism in Braille. Yours truly had an opportunity to examine this book at that time, when the deaf-blind mission was still in its infancy, ten years ago, little dreaming then, that he would ever have occasion to depend upon such reading matter almost entirely for his contact with the Word of God.

During the course of my travels

through the country, I once had the opportunity to visit a meeting of the senior society of a fairly large congregation in the middle West. The pastor, with whom I was visiting, had told me that this society alone was paying a great part of the salary of a foreign missionary. He told me to watch and see how they gathered the funds for this purpose. So when the meeting was in progress, I noticed that a little miniature church was being passed from one member to another. In the two sides of the roof of this model church, were slits into which they put what little change they had; sometimes it would be a nickel, a dime, or a quarter, whatever change the members happened to have in their pockets. The pastor had told me that this plan had been brought up in the society spontaneously among the members without any hint or suggestion on his part whatever.

Now, let me say from the very beginning that you need not think this MUST BE done. I am telling you only what others have done.

Down in a southwestern state, there is one of your own Lutheran boys of nineteen years, who was born blind. He writes me in Braille from the state school for the blind, that the members of the churches take turns to see that he and two other Lutheran boys get to church every Sunday. If you should happen to know of a blind person living in your neighborhood, who does not often get to church, why not investigate and see if you cannot see that he or she likewise gets to church regularly.

Again, this young man is graduating from the high school department of his state's school for the blind this coming May. He writes a good Braille letter. I don't know whether he has a Braille typewriter or not, but you may know of some blind person who is attending high school or the university, to whom such a typewriter for his or her Braille notes would be a Godsend. Rev. A. H. Kuntz, whose address is: 805 Lindaraxa Park, Alhambra, California, will be able to give you an address where you can obtain such a typewriter for writing Braille. Remember, such a machine is not only for the totally blind, but also for those who have greatly impaired eyesight, and have taken up Braille for its convenience in taking notes. Then, much as it may seem impossible or unlikely to you, there ARE blind stenographers among the 130,000 blind people in the United States.

Your financial disposal of this project might be taken care of by getting an old cigar box, covering it with paper, and placing on its cover a picture of a blind person reading a Braille book.

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This is only a brief hint. Any resourceful Leaguer can vary this idea extensively.

Then, there is the problem of getting Lutheran literature into the possession of some blind person who does not know what the Lutheran Church stands for. I have told you above that the price of the Bible in Braille is very cheap. The entire Bible in Braille comes in twenty volumes, of which five make up the New Testament. Then there is a hymnbook for Lutheran blind people, which is cumulative. The "Lutheran Messenger for the Blind," in each issue, has both the words and music of three hymns. These are on pages which can be removed from the magazine and placed in a hymnbook with the other hymns without injury to the other pages of the magazine. Yes, there is a special system in Braille music, by which the blind may learn to *play* the music as well as sing the tune. Pastor Kuntz can give you this information also, if you would like some blind friend to have such a Braille hymnbook.

Then, there are two different sources of the well-known "SEEING EYE" dogs in the United States; one in New Jersey, and one in California. These highly efficient and faithful animals cost from \$150 to \$500. The future owner of these dogs must spend a specified time in training with the dog in order to become accustomed to its proper use. During the year 1936, there was a story in the "Walther League Messenger,"

which was read to me after I lost my own eyesight. If you will look up the copies of the "Messenger" for that year, you will find upon reading this story over, how useful such an animal can be to a blind person. Somewhere, there are blind people who could do much work, even earn their own living, if they had such a friendly and capable dog to lead them around. These dogs are carried in the coaches of the railroad right with the blind person, and not in the baggage car. One young lady who owns one of these dogs tells me that this dog, while she attended the university, went with her to all her classes, all through her course at the university. Whenever she travels, the dog lies at her feet in the railroad coach. In the auto stage, the dog sits on the seat beside her, as proud as if he owned the world, and takes great care that his owner is not annoyed by any dangerous character who might think of harming her. These dogs know the different colors of the traffic signals, and will not allow the blind person to put one step into the street until all traffic has ceased moving.

Now, if you should know of some young person who would like to attend the university, perhaps you could find ways and means to make it possible, both with a Braille typewriter and a "SEEING EYE" dog, for him or her to do so.

In conclusion, let me say that there are many things which I did not understand while I had my vision, but which God has given me to understand since I am in darkness. He has drawn me much closer to Himself, for one thing.

Time and again, when I have asked myself the question: "Why has God done this to me?" the answer seems to have come to me in that still, small voice, as Jesus told Peter on the occasion of the institution of the Lord's Supper: "What I do now, thou knowest not; but thou shalt know hereafter." God often gives us a cross to bear, that He may teach us the true value of His Word, and I cannot emphasize this truth enough, that He has done it in my case. I have learned to appreciate His Word all the more since I am able to read it in Braille. In my darkness, (and I know from other blind people that it is true also with them) that I can understand His Word much better since I am blind, than I could before.

There is a sacred ballad, which expresses this very aptly, and I can do no better than to close with a quotation of it in its entirety. It is entitled "The Blind Plowman."

Set my hands upon the plow,
My feet upon the sod;
Turn my face towards the East,
And praises be to God.
Every year the rains do fall;
The seeds, they sprout in spring.
Every year the spreading trees
Shelter birds that sing.
From the shelter of your hearts,
Brothers, drive out sin;
Let the little birds of faith
Come and nest therein.
God has made His sun to shine
On both you and me;
God who took away mine eyes
That my soul might see.

and also 1,796 other week-day educational agencies. In all other Lutheran bodies Christian Day schools or week-day religious instruction periods have their place. The Lutheran Church knows that religious instruction is the best means for inculcating genuine patriotism. The motto, "For God and country," is not only a card upon the wall of the classroom but a principle and teaching; a creed to believe and live for the Lord's sake; a duty to discharge.

The Service Bulletin of the Western District Board of Christian Education (Missouri Synod) presented the following excellent suggestions in connection with a war-time period.

1. Work on projects for salvaging needed materials. Children can collect paper, metals, old rubber, etc.

2. Work on a campaign to promote the sale of defense bonds and stamps. These plans can be advanced, discussed, and executed through classes in the social studies, or by special class meetings. Instructions can also be given the children for passing on pertinent information to the home. Money received from the sale of salvaged material can be invested in war saving stamps and bonds for the benefit of the school.

3. Give instruction in First Aid to all pupils in grades seven and eight. More than fifty teachers in our schools in St. Louis and vicinity have taken the prescribed teachers' course and are now qualified to instruct classes in First Aid. Offer your services to the community.

4. Organize your school as a de-

sion. If a regular flag pole is too expensive, an inexpensive bracket fastened to the school will do. By all means observe the state law. Every classroom should have a flag, and the children should regularly pledge their allegiance to the flag. Teach the children proper flag etiquette.

8. Participate in civic affairs as an individual in the community and enter your school in all civic affairs in which other schools are enrolled.

9. Teach the children to sing many good patriotic songs. Offer to have the children sing them at patriotic rallies and civic affairs.

The Lutheran School of the Atonement, Dearborn, Michigan, reports, "We are using the 'Duplex Homi-lobes' envelopes. Since the entry of our country in the war, it was decided that all contributions received in the one packet would be used in the purchase of war stamps, later to be converted into war bonds and made payable to the congregation for the beautifying of the interior of the church."

Your Child Is Proud of You

But—when your child begins to learn:

That there is one God who justly deserves to be worshipped by all His creatures;

That there is one Book, the Bible, in which God speaks to the children of men;

That there is one Savior of sinners,

Why not go to church and consecrate yourself to your Savior who suffered and died for you that you might not be lost?

Your child may wonder, but you will see a new light in its eyes. It will honor you as never before and will bless your memory when you have long passed away.

Bring your child to Sunday School and come to the services yourself.

Start this Sunday.—*Paul G. Sander.*
(Submitted by A.W.B.)

Wanted

Professional men, doctors, dentists, lawyers, etc., to help the Pastor build up the "down and out" men and women with problems that weigh them down in the battle of life.

* * *

Groups from Ladies Aid and Mission Guilds to visit welfare institutions bi-monthly or monthly. "A song service in the wards cheered my patients," says a hospital chaplain.

* * *

Office secretaries, give your pastor some of your spare time. The pastor has much correspondence and will welcome the services of a "volunteer parish secretary."

* * *

The Bulletin Board represents the show window of the church. Weekly change of the message is desirable. If the responsibility of taking care of the Bulletin Board is vested in one person, instead of being everybody's business, an attractive bulletin board is the result. Will you volunteer to be that "one person?"

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